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The CIA On Campus Again

The Central Intelligence Agency acknowledges that it is actively pursuing ties with academia. That represents quite a change in the relationship between the agency and institutions of higher learning. Not so many years ago, the CIA was persona non grata at many universities.

Now, says Deputy Director Robert Gates, about a quarter of the CIA's intelligence reports are reviewed by professors or other outside experts and, since 1982, the agency has hosted some 75 conferences a year that involve academic participation. In previous years, according to Mr. Gates, only a "minuscule" number of agency reports were reviewed by outsiders and prior to 1982 the CIA sponsored just three or four conferences a year.

Why the change? For one thing, the CIA apparently realizes that intelligence failures (such as its predictions on the shah of Iran) were the result of a "U.S. govern-

ment perspective" resistant to outside opinion. Secondly, the anti-CIA sentiment has subsided. Thirdly, as federal money for academic research dries up, support from any quarter may become appealing.

As a recent controversy involving Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies demonstrates, the CIA is still not above insisting on censorship rights and secrecy. But in the main, the agency is taking a more acceptable position on issues of academic freedom. Still the question remains, should professors have ties with the CIA?

As long as those relationships are marked by openness and are free from restrictions that compromise free inquiry, that decision is best left to the judgment and conscience of the individual professor. Some will see no wrong in dealing with the CIA. But others will stop short of accepting support from an agency with a history of political subversion and clandestine war.

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